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THINK JEWISHLY. ACT LOCALLY.

TESTIMONY ON HB429- POSITION: FAVORABLE

Public Safety - Law Enforcement Agencies - Body-Worn Cameras

TO: Chair Clippinger, Vice Chair Moon, and members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Karen Caplan, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUF)

My name is Karen Caplan and I live in Silver Spring, Maryland, in District 18. I am providing this testimony in support of HB429, Public Safety - Law Enforcement Agencies - Body-Worn Cameras on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUF). JUF organizes more than 6,000 Jewish Marylanders and allies in support of local and state campaigns for social, racial, and economic justice inspired by Jewish values.

Transparency, or *Shkifut*, is a value rooted in the Jewish tradition, derived from verses from the Mishnah commanding us to be clean before God and Israel. Increasing transparency was the goal of so many of the policing reforms the General Assembly enacted last year, including the first ever creation of a statewide body-worn camera requirement. This requirement increases transparency and, coupled with new disciplinary systems, accountability, by ensuring that interactions between law enforcement and the people they are charged with protecting are recorded.

Unfortunately, significant portions of police interactions will still go unrecorded unless last year's bill is amended to include plainclothes officers, municipal police departments, and officers working secondary employment as police officers.

Kwamena Ocran, who this bill is named for, was one of 7 people killed in 2021 by police in Montgomery County where I live. These members of my community were killed by plainclothes officers, municipal officers, off-duty officers, and uniformed Montgomery County Police officers. However, we only have body-worn camera (BWC) footage for those few who were killed by the uniformed MCPD officers, and this is not acceptable. We also witnessed the brutal

treatment of a five year old child by MCPD officers only because of their BWC footage - while this was painful to watch, we had to see it to understand the depth of the problems with policing in our County.

Kwamena Ocran's killing by plainclothes police officers was not an aberration. Around the country and right here in Maryland, plainclothes officers have much higher rates of misconduct; most notoriously, the members of the Baltimore City Gun Trace Task Force. One of the members of the plainclothes unit that killed Kwamena Ocran had a reputation for harassing members of the community in Gaithersburg, and in Montgomery County, a Maryland Public Information Act request revealed that two of the plainclothes Gaithersburg City police officers who killed Kwamena Ocran engaged in abusive conduct during a traffic stop, also while in plainclothes, just 18 months earlier.

Recognizing the need for greater transparency, the City of Gaithersburg amended their body-worn camera policy after Kwamena's killing to expressly include plainclothes officers. The City of Rockville, another municipal police department in my County, also requires its plainclothes officers and non-uniformed investigators to wear body-worn cameras and allows off duty officers working secondary employment to wear them.

These are not radical requests, they are sensible extensions of a law you passed because you knew that the more we all can see, the better off we all will be. **On behalf of JUFJ, I respectfully urge a favorable report on HB429.**